

## **Wilson Supports Improvements to the Rural Health Care System**

Washington - The Rural Health Care Coalition today unveiled H.R. 2860, the Health Care Access and Rural Equity Act (H-CARE). This bipartisan legislation, which was introduced with 52 co-sponsors, is a comprehensive bill that makes several improvements to our nation's health care infrastructure.

"The H-Care Act will ensure all Americans have access to basic, affordable and reliable healthcare," Congressman Charlie Wilson (OH-6) said. Wilson is a member of the bipartisan Rural Healthcare Coalition. The group is made up of 170 Members of Congress committed to advancing rural priorities in health care policy.

The bill is a comprehensive piece of legislation that makes several improvements to help rural healthcare providers address the challenges associated with delivering quality healthcare close to home. To date, 12 national organizations have endorsed the H-CARE Act, along with numerous statewide organizations from across the nation.

H.R. 2860 will:

- Authorize health information technology grants for rural practitioners.
- Provide flexibility in the number of beds Critical Access Hospitals are allowed to fill.
- Require prompt payment to rural pharmacies by Medicare prescription drug plans.
- Ensure adequate rural representation on the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission.
- Establish a Rural Health Quality Advisory Commission.
- Raise Rural Health Clinic reimbursements to more appropriately cover costs.
- Extend several expiring Medicare adjustment payments for rural practitioners including physicians practicing in physician scarcity areas, rural ambulance providers, rural home health agencies and specific classes of rural hospitals.

"The Sixth District of Ohio is fortunate to have two critical access hospitals. These centers

provide tens of thousands of patients a year with crucial healthcare. Without these hospitals, sick families would be forced to travel long distances for basic care. We must protect these hospitals and get them the support they need to survive," Wilson said.

Wilson met this past weekend with Barnesville Hospital CEO, Rick Doan. Doan estimates that Barnesville alone sees about 50,000 outpatients annually. In addition the hospital cares for approximately 2,000 inpatients and conducts about 14,000 home health visits and 250,000 lab tests every year.

The legislation would allow small rural hospitals to receive 100 percent reasonable cost reimbursement for clinical diagnostic tests covered under Medicare Part B that are provided as outpatient services. Often, a rural hospital is the only lab facility serving a given region and this provision was intended to benefit these providers allowing them to remain viable in the communities they serve.

Currently hospitals like Barnesville often lose money when they perform those outpatient tests. "We do those tests because the nursing homes need us to do them," Doan said. "The patients need us."

"I'm proud to be an original co-sponsor of the Health Care Access and Rural Equity Act of 2007," Wilson said. "This legislation will help stabilize the rural healthcare infrastructure and remedy inadequate reimbursement rates that hospitals like Barnesville face.

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